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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2260

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000179

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2019

TAGS: PREL ETRD EIND CVIS TX UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEK DIPLOMAT EXPLORES U.S. BUSINESS EXPERIENCE
-- AND VISA REFORM -- IN TURKMENISTAN

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Uzbek Embassy Consul, Abdulmajid Dusimov (please protect), said in a meeting on February 3 that Uzbek Embassies are looking for successful examples of international investments, and that he wanted to discuss with Economic Officer the U.S. experience in Turkmenistan. Further clarification revealed that Dusimov was not interested in "investment" per se, but rather in the success of U.S. exports to Turkmenistan, in particular Case New Holland farm equipment. Uzbekistan hopes to reach an agreement to sell its tractors to Turkmenistan during President Berdimuhamedov's visit to Uzbekistan later this month. Dusimov asked about the breadth of Case New Holland's product line, and wanted to know how U.S. companies concluded agreements with Turkmenistan. Dusimov said that the prosperity of Uzbekistan's neighbors is a priority for the Uzbek Government because such prosperity would benefit the entire region.

¶2. (C) Dusimov acknowledged the fact that power is concentrated at the top of Turkmenistan's Government, and said that relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had improved after last year's visit of Uzbek President Karimov to Ashgabat. He suggested that the positive relations now enjoyed by the Presidents had improved working-level relations as well. In fact, the Uzbek Embassy is now encouraging a dialogue with Turkmenistan to simplify the visa regime -- and to make it less expensive for citizens of both countries to cross the border. Dusimov specifically mentioned that cumbersome visa requirements had driven some people to cross the border illegally in order to attend funerals of family members who lived on the other side of the border. Dusimov described some Uzbek citizens who were caught by the Turkmen police and thrown in jail -- "and a year of their lives is gone." Dusimov wanted to see the number of these instances reduced. In addition, Turkmenistan levies some of the highest visa fees in the region, which are difficult for the average Uzbek to afford. Dusimov is hopeful that these working-level discussions will evolve in a positive direction throughout the year.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: In the past the Turkmen Government has been unwilling to budge from its tightly-controlled visa policy. In our meetings with the Foreign Ministry about visa

issues, it has seemed that visa policy (as with many other policies) was set solely at the highest levels of government.

Since there are many ethnic Uzbeks in the northern part of the country, if Turkmenistan is serious about improving relations with Uzbekistan, meeting them halfway on visa reform could be a first step in that direction. END COMMENT.

MILES